



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

I greet you, citing the words of the Lord: "But ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19)

We are happy to send you on the occasion of Pentecost once again the EKHN Newsletter with the latest news from the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). This is now the tenth edition. In it we celebrate a small anniversary, which testifies to the continuity of the relationship between our churches.

The central theme in this issue is the ongoing change in ministerial duties, not only in our congregations, but also at the regional level. In previous issues of the Newsletter we already reported that church and society in Germany are undergoing drastic changes. This issue contains various life sketches of our ministers, documenting how the spectrum of pastoral duties has changed over the years.

I am also very much interested to hear about experiences, you have gathered in pastoral work in your churches. We might be able to learn from you. Therefore I'm looking forward to meeting and having face-to-face conversations with you.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Walter Schneider

Under this slogan the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) together with the Union of Protestant Churches in Germany (EKD) and other Christian denominations launched a campaign to keep Sunday as a public holiday. In the year 321 the Roman Emperor Constantine declared Sunday a day of rest. Since that time Sunday has become a cultural asset in the western hemisphere, where it is for most people a day free of work. Shops remain closed. Article 140 of the German Constitution clearly states that Sunday is a legal holiday.

Mainly because of economic interests, the status of Sunday as a day free of work has been undermined for a number of years now. The number of Sundays per year, during which shops are allowed to open, has increased significantly. In reaction to this trend churches have stressed that according to God's will Sunday is a day of rest; that



Sunday as a day of leisure and contemplation gives a certain rhythm to the week; that it is a day commemorating our foundation as a Christian community; and that the day puts mankind in the center of all things and not machines, which do not need recuperation. In short, it ought to be a day for the family and religion. (dk)

## Report

**EKHN celebrates 60th Anniversary.** In September of last year the synod celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). After the Second World War, on September 30, 1947, the EKHN was founded in the city of Friedberg, located 30 km north of Frankfurt. Three existing regional churches united in this founding act. Under the leadership of the first Church President Martin Niemöller the EKHN received an entirely new structure, based on democratic principles. (dk)

**A new Church President will be elected in September.** In December of this year the EKHN Church President, Prof. Dr. Peter Steinacker, will celebrate his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Having reached retirement age, he will step down. Hence, members of the synod will have to elect a new President. In compliance, the synod board, which is in charge of the organization of the electoral proceedings, has designated September 27, 2008 as election day. (dk)

**Perspective 2030 – EKD starts a Reform Process.** In response to demographic changes within German society and in anticipation of a decrease in financial resources, the Union of Protestant Churches (EKD) has launched a reform process. The main aims are as follows: reaching more

people where they live and work, concentrating church activities and reducing church structures. In line with these aims negotiations regarding closer cooperation between the Protestant Churches in Kurhessen-Waldeck and in Hesse and Nassau have been started. (dk)

**New mosque in Frankfurt – a sign of integration.** The Islamic Hazrat Fatima Congregation in Frankfurt is planning to construct a new mosque and community center at the outskirts of Frankfurt. These plans are subject of a controversial debate: local people fear an "Islamic infiltration" of German society. However, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) does not share these fears. It welcomes plans for the new mosque, because they indicate that a successful integration of the Islamic community into German society is taking place. (dk)

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## From a Lonely Fighter to a Team Player

### Pastoral duties and role of minister change

Sigurd Rink was born in 1960. The changing role of the minister he has experienced in person – in practical, as well as in theoretical terms. To be precise, he was one of the contributors to a discussion paper concerning the professional image of the minister. Of course, he also knows older colleagues who struggle as stubborn lonely fighters when they bring the Gospel to the people. They are not keen on sharing responsibility with others. In short, they embody the patriarchal Protestant parson. Rink himself became a man of the cloth in the eighties of the last century and performed his duties as a dynamic young minister on the outskirts of Frankfurt. "There we had a very active church council; it was able to get things done," Rink remembers. Today he serves as Provost in higher echelons. The congregation needed at the time someone with basic qualifications: the ability to provide spiritual counseling, to conduct church services, and to teach religion in schools. "That was our job at the time," Rink says, adding, "and we all had a streak of idealism in us." In former times the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) was a kind of ministerial church, with the church council acting as a governing body. Meetings were held every four to six weeks. In these the minister received his instructions. "By and large these times have changed, because church congregations have simply become too big," Rink explains. What he was doing with his congregation at that time, is becoming more and more the standard operational procedure within the regional church. "The minister preoccupies himself primarily with the Protestant profile and is not burdened with the task of balancing the church budget." In most places, even in small communities experts can be found to take care of that. "Even in a village there will be someone to supervise a nursery school," Sigurd Rink believes. Volunteers must, of course, also have a say, when decisions are made. Minister and church council work together as a team. Communication is of prime importance in these joint ef-



orts. In his capacity as Provost Rink frequently hears of conflicts between ministers and church councils. "The expectations are often exceedingly high, when a new minister is posted to a congregation. Disappointment is unavoidable in this case," he says. A catalogue of aims, devised together with the church council helps to alleviate the situation. "We are developing guide lines, going in this direction." Surprisingly ministers have enjoyed constant high esteem over the years. It is noteworthy that the same cannot be said for teachers. Provost Rink feels that mandatory residence in the parsonage is of prime importance. "In the context of metropolitan cities this significance may become blurred, in small towns the parsonage is that much more important. Where else can you find communal life these days? A minister doesn't come to work at nine o'clock in the morning and he or she doesn't punch out at five o'clock in the afternoon. Nonetheless, the job is financially secure. "And the freedom of preaching the Gospel is a value that cannot be measured in material terms," Rink says and points to studies, which state that in spite of the high demands the calling makes on them, most ministers would not want to change to another profession.

(Andrea Seeger)

*A reason to rejoice: The baptism of a baby – one of the tasks of ministers in the congregation.*

## Wide Spectrum of Pastoral Duties

### Eric Bohn, Country Parson in Rhine-Hesse

Eric Bohn (39) is minister in three villages in a rural winegrowing region and has been performing his duties for almost three years



now. He describes his three congregations as intact and full of life and says, that every village has its peculiarities. Usually the Rev. Bohn conducts two services per Sunday – alternately in different villages. He travels in his car up to 500 km per month, in order to keep up with his appointments. Eric Bohn just loves the direct contact with his congregation members. “One is closer to people here than in the city. Here the minister is still perceived as a person commanding respect,” he says. Actually he wants to get away from the minister-centeredness in the congregation. However, the expectations placed on him are

numerous. For the elderly, as well as for the young, he is supposed to be a “special person”. During classes in religious education he is expected to sing. It is expected that he knows how to deal with children. And it goes without saying that he baptizes, performs weddings, conducts funeral services and visits older people on their birthdays.

It is not uncommon that people ring his doorbell when they are in trouble. He would like to relate the personal life stories of his congregation members to the Bible in a fitting way. Work with children and with juveniles is particularly important to him. This year the lively minister is particularly preoccupied with the 50th anniversary of the church brass band. And Eric Bohn puts much emphasis on contact with the secular community, be it the voluntary fire department, the carnival association or the rifle club. He considers it to be important that the church demonstrates its presence in the social life of the community.

At many commemorative events for example he is expected to deliver spiritual welcoming speeches. (lb/mkr)

### Klaus Weißgerber, Urban Ministry in Gießen

As a Protestant minister the fifty-year-old Klaus Weißgerber has to coordinate his service hours with his Catholic colleague. After all, both of them are responsible for the so-called “church-store”, being at the same time a store and a place to chat, in the heart of the city of Giessen. It is a joint venture of the two denominations. Up to ten customers come in every day seeking information about ecclesiastic life or buying Bibles or rosaries. The Rev. Klaus Weißgerber has studied Protestant theology and pedagogics, served in several congregations before and he has been taking care of the “low threshold” ecclesiastic drop-in center for about five years now. Officially he fills half a position in urban ministry and the other half as “social responsibility commissioner”. He

sees himself as the contact person for the public: “I do not work in a traditional congregation with constant members. Instead I try to establish contact with target groups or work on specific themes”, he says. Weißgerber is contact person for many people who normally have little to do with the church. He organizes special church services, e.g. during the annual city festival on the market place. He keeps in touch with municipal politicians and talks extensively with people of the business world and with journalists. “People in the city see in me the church,” Weißgerber characterizes his work, which “of course” includes a considerable amount of spiritual counseling. Although his duties deviate from the norm, Weißgerber sees himself as a “regular minister”. He baptizes, performs weddings, and holds funeral services – just like a “normal minister”. (mkr)



## Devotional Service in the Classroom

The Riedberg in the northern part of Frankfurt is a new housing estate. 17.000 people will find a new home there. Presently it has 2.500 inhabitants, for the most part families with small children. And the church is right in the middle of things. For the time being the Protestant congregation is making use of three classrooms in the local elementary school. “We are constructing,” the Rev. Ilona Nord says and gleams. The church and the congregational center are scheduled to be finished next year. Up till then the thirty toddlers of the congregation will find room in the school. Devotional services will be held in chair circles. Everything else will take place outside or in the entrance hall of the school.

“Ministerial basics are much in demand here,” the Rev. Nord says. “Taizé” or healing services are

much in demand. In the 450 member congregation many are asking for a Bible study group. “Starting next Fall, we will deal critically with questions of faith,” she promises. She would like to do so many things, but having only a part-time position, she frequently has to say “No”. The Rev. Nord admits, “I strongly perceive a certain tension between my calling and the fact that I only have half a position.” She finds it helpful that she doesn’t have to be there all the time. Hence, the minister and the congregation are at least sometimes spatially separated, for she also needs time for paperwork, for her own children, and for housework. “What I miss, is a ministerial husband,” she says.



What she has in mind, is the clergyman, who has a wife, not tied down by a job, who supports him as an unpaid volunteer worker in his congregational duties. In fact the Rev. Ilona Nord is married to another minister. However, her husband is fully preoccupied with his duties in church communications. She is frustrated, because putting the new congregation in the Riedberg on a solid foundation, she has to rack her brain with administrative work. The Rev. Ilona Nord verbatim: “If we are to become stronger spiritual leaders, we need more resources.” (as)

*Building up a new congregation. The church uses school rooms for its work.*

## “For Life” – Genuine Pastoral Care



Sigrid Hornung has spent more time in prison than most of those who serve a “life sentence”. As a rule they get out after fifteen years. In contrast to them, the Rev. Hornung has been active behind prison walls for more than twenty years – and it gives her the feeling of doing something meaningful. Darmstadt Penitentiary is her third “jailhouse”. Prisoners and members of their families trust her and come to her. They sense that she engages herself on their behalf on two accounts: She helps inmates to survive their term of imprisonment and prepares them for life outside of prison after their release.

Her day-to-day job consists of face-to-face conversations with prisoners and of making telephone calls to the outside. Devotional services are most important. Here inmates can be drawn out of their isolation. Asked whether inmates abuse devotional services to just “shoot the breeze”, she smirked: “I broke them of this bad habit in the first devotional service,” explaining, “I simply asked the attending guard to conduct the four chatterboxes back to their cells. Word got around and that was the end of that.” However, the contemplative silence during services is something quite different from the discipline she

enforced four years ago in a show-down during devotional service.” “I made it clear to them that the service is very important to me. The participants perceived that it could be for them too a different place. When fifty or sixty men have memorized the liturgy and sing it forcefully or if they sing the “Laudate omnes gentes” in various voices, you can perceive that they are emotionally involved. Even a choir has evolved. “The participants note that others recognize them; they sense that they are capable of doing something positive; that boosts their self-esteem and makes them proud,” the Rev. Hornung says. (as)

### Ministerial positions in the EKHN in the Year 2007

Congregational ministerial positions .....	1034
Non-congregational ministerial positions in the region .....	408
• e.g. deans, prison and hospital chaplains, urban ministry, and positions in the communication department	
• e.g. 148 ministers who provide religious education in schools	
Ministerial positions in the church at large .....	114
• e.g. positions in church governing bodies, church administration, special centers, Protestant schools, as well as special assignments for ministers	
Total number of ministerial positions in the EKHN .....	1556

Source: Synod of the EKHN, November 2007